

Lions and the Lambs by LIFOtheparty

Category: Stranger Things, 2016

Genre: Family, Hurt-Comfort

Language: English

Characters: Billy H., J. Hopper

Status: Completed

Published: 2017-11-05 21:21:06

Updated: 2017-11-05 21:21:06

Packaged: 2019-12-17 04:43:28

Rating: K+

Chapters: 1

Words: 2,333

Publisher: www.fanfiction.net

Summary: Billy wasn't born a malicious bully, he was forged by a scorching fire that left jagged edges. Things had settled down in Hawkins, Indiana after the gate was closed, but Billy's abusive father is worse than ever. After a particularly brutal beating, he turns to Hopper for help.

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Feel free to take this story and run with it, but this is where it ends for me. I am a poor college student who owns nothing, including these characters. I should be studying accounting right now, so accurate medical advice has taken a back seat.

Lions and the Lambs

If asked to describe his character in a single animal, Billy would always choose the lion. However, in the face of a particularly severe beating from his father he certainly didn't feel like one now. If he were to be truly honest with himself, Billy knew his aggressive and hateful personality was a result of his abusive father. Albeit obnoxious, Billy's tactics at least instilled fear in his peers. People stayed out of his way, the girls worshipped him, and the basketball team needed him. If it were so easy to lash out and earn respect, why couldn't Billy stand up against his father? Why was it that every moment in his presence scared the hell out of him? Why was he becoming the man who he hated the most?

An unexpected punch to the jaw and Billy's head slammed against the doorway where he was cornered. He slid to the floor in pain. Usually, the beating stopped there, but after a particularly nasty exchange of words between Billy and his father, Mr. Hargrove wasn't having any of it. Finding exposed places on his torso, he landed kick after kick. Billy knew it was awful when his step-mother stood in the corner and quietly whimpered for him to stop. She was just as bad. Never laid a hand on Billy, loving or otherwise, but she was always there watching as the beating unfolded. Never about to aid Billy and pretend to uphold the values of a loving family.

Billy didn't realize he had blacked out, but he figured it had been awhile as he saw a small glass of water beside him. The belated

gesture of kindness from his step-mother only served to anger him more. He punched the wall beside him, splitting his knuckles and watched a small stream of blood run down his hand. People thought he was insane doing rash things that resulted in avoidable injury, but Billy only saw it as a physical manifestation of his growing hatred for himself.

Hearing his father's footsteps coming down the hallway, probably in response to the new hole in the wall, Billy jumped up with fear. His tough guy persona could only get him so far and despite his status as high school senior, he was deathly afraid of his father. Billy grabbed his car keys and left the house. Fuming with anger, he hit the gas and sped into the night.

He laughed at himself when he found his car stopped in front of Hopper's small cottage. "What am I becoming, a snitch?" Despite the situation at home, Billy decided at a young age he would never be a snitch. The trouble that happened at home would stay there and anyone who questioned it would receive a most unpleasant beating. Tonight, was no exception and if Billy were being honest with himself, he knew exactly why he drove there. Unbeknownst to the vast majority, kids from abusive households had a funny knack for noticing each other. A strategically placed scar, a slight hesitation when family is brought up, a short temper, whatever the cue may be, Billy had become a pro at picking it up. Although he had met Hopper only a couple times, he knew an ally when he met one.

With the adrenaline quickly fading, Billy become more aware of the extent of his beating. A swollen eye, bloodied face, and at least one broken rib, he knew he looked much worse for wear. Clutching his aching ribs, he rang the doorbell and leaned against the doorway for support. A moment passed before the door opened and Hopper appeared.

"Jesus, son. Rough night?" Hopper asked.

"I don't want to talk about it. C-can I stay here tonight?" By the end of his sentence Billy was nearly whispering out of pain and reluctance to ask for help. Hopper moved to the side of the doorway, signaling Billy to enter. Billy took a step and froze. One look at Hopper and he knew exactly what Billy was asking.

"Jane's at a sleepover with some friends tonight. You don't have to worry about her, kid." It might have seemed like a silly question to ask, but Billy wasn't ready to show his vulnerability to just anyone yet. Despite his feeling of passing out at any moment, he would've just as quickly turned around and found a dry place in the woods to spend the night.

Hopper gently took Billy's arm and led him to the couch, slightly concerned by Billy's involuntary jerk to pull away. "Kid, you came to me. I've an idea of what you're going through and you know I'd never hurt you."

Billy chuckled under his breath bitterly, "I guess old habits die hard."

Hopper went to his bedroom and produced an extensive first-aid kit. "I'm going to clean up, then we'll get you set up here on the couch. You don't have to worry about anyone coming through that door tonight." Hopper wasn't usually one for words, but he knew informing Billy of his plan would help put the kid at ease a bit. Taking a sterile wipe from his kit, Hopper placed a steadying hand on Billy and began to clean up his wounds. Not to Hopper's surprise, Billy remained stoic, only wincing occasionally when he cleaned a couple particularly deep cuts.

Although Hopper had experienced some tough encounters with his father, he wasn't immune to seeing a young kid in pain. Hopper's heart went out to the kid and he had a lot of questions that he knew would remain unanswered. If he had learned anything from his past, he knew Billy was tired of questions. Supplying answers only caused more pain and instigated his short temper. Tonight, Hopper was staying strictly to his role as medic and protector. It was several minutes of silence before Hopper sufficiently bandaged Billy's facial wounds and swollen hand.

"Take off your shirt and I'll take a look at your ribs." Billy kept staring at the wall, seemingly unaware of Hopper's instructions. "C'mon, I know I'm not one of your pretty ladies, but what's stopping you now?" Hopper instantly regretted his dry sense of humor. *This kid's been through a lot tonight, tone it down.* Luckily, his smart remark fell on deaf ears. Deciding to give Billy a moment to recover, Hopper got up and retrieved a small bundle of ice for his bruised eye. When he

returned, Billy was a little more coherent and more like himself. "Think you can get that shirt off for me now?" Hopper asked, keeping his patience.

Billy joked back, "You're lucky, most of my fans have to be a little more charming." Although his shirt was already half unbuttoned, Billy struggled with the last few. He shook slightly with exhaustion and his swollen hand kept shooting pain, making his fingers temporarily useless. Hopper was quick to notice how Billy's vulnerability was crumbling his composure. Although it would've been nice to have a heart to heart with Billy, Hopper knew the kid was already emotionally spent, any sobbing would exacerbate the pain in his ribs, and he was probably slow to trust a man he'd only met a couple times before. For a guy in Billy's position, earning his trust was a long and difficult process. Any wrong move or perceived threat would drive Billy away entirely.

"Here, it's tough with that bandaged hand of yours," Hopper offered in response. Billy moved his hands away slightly and Hopper made quick work of the remaining buttons. After a team effort to slide off the shirt, Billy's torso was exposed. Hopper had imagined it wouldn't be pretty, but he wasn't prepared to see the brilliant shades of bruises that covered his entire chest. With a little bit of persuasion, Hopper eased Billy down on the couch as he checked for broken ribs and signs of internal bleeding. The process was painful as Hopper instructed Billy to take deep breaths, he checked each rib. He found at least two cracked for sure, but with the swelling and extensive bruising, it was possible there were more. Hopper produced a jar of salve and slowly applied it to Billy's bruises. Unexpectedly, Billy tensed and jerked away from Hopper. "What's wrong kid? Am I hurting you?" Hopper asked, surprised.

"No, ju-just having a hard time catching my breath. N-not feeling in c-control," Billy responded in quick gasps. Already suspecting a panic attack, Hopper gently raised his fingers to Billy's neck confirmed by his increasingly rapid pulse.

"Easy Billy, just listen to me okay. You're safe here. No one's going to hurt you. I'm not going to hurt you."

"I know!" Billy practically screamed, jumping up from the couch. "I

know, but it's not helping. What's wrong with me?" Billy took a couple steps before doubling over in pain, his chest heaving. "What's wrong with me?" He whispered between choked sobs. Hopper gently embraced him, careful to avoid further injuring his ribs.

"It's okay, son. Nothing's wrong with you. Your dad's lost a fight with his demons. You'll always have a home here." Hopper slowly rubbed circles on Billy's back, feeling his hot breath even out against his neck. It was minutes before Billy regained his composure and was able to move to the couch with Hopper's help. With additional care, Hopper finished applying the cooling salve on his bruises and wrapping his ribs. Billy continued to tremble, shaken by emotional exhaustion. "I'm going to give you something for the pain, so you can get some rest tonight. If you think it hurts now, you'll feel it much more in the morning."

"No, I can handle it. I don't want to be drowsy," Billy said firmly. Although slightly annoyed, Hopper understood. After a beating like that, it was going to be awhile until Billy felt at ease and in his state, the last thing he needed was another outlet to find an unhealthy escape.

"I've got Advil, but if you need something stronger, give me a shout. I'll be just down the hall." Billy nodded in understanding and it wasn't long before he was bedded down and passed out.

Hopper woke to Billy's screams. Jumping out of bed, he raced to check on Billy to find him in a cold sweat, lost in a nightmare. "Dad, please dad, don't. I'm sorry, it will never happen again... Please, I promise it will never happen again... Yes, I respect you sir." The last part, Billy was practically crying. Tears were pooling in the corner of his eyes and slowly dribbling down his face.

"Wake up, son. It's just a bad dream. You're safe with me." Hopper slowly repeated the words, careful to approach Billy in case he lashed out. Billy came to, shaking with a reminder of the horrors he relived. He looked up at Hopper, slowly regaining an awareness of his surroundings.

Hopper took a towel and dabbed Billy's sweat-drenched hair. "You remember where you are?" Hopper asked quietly.

"Yeah."

"Do you think your father would know where you are?"

"No. He wouldn't care anyway, unless it messed with his own plans." Billy shot back bitterly.

Hopper grabbed a shotgun from the wall and pulled up a chair near the couch. "What are you doing?" Billy asked cautiously.

"People tell you that you're safe, but if you've experienced danger in your own home, it's sometimes hard to believe. I can tell you that you're safe in my home all night, but I know that it's hard to take my word. You anger quickly at people who say things, but take no action. It's okay Billy, I do too. If it takes me sitting by the door with a shotgun for you to get a wink of sleep, I'll gladly be your guard."

Billy stared, at a loss for words. He'd never been one for thank-yous, but if a single look could portray it, he had said it a thousand times over. "Do you think people change, Hopper?"

Hopper stayed silent for a moment, pondering the unexpected question. "I think it's like overcoming an addiction. There's a moment in your life when you hit a dead end and you have to make a decision to change. Some people do and some people accept that their poor decisions are the new way of life. Then, you face challenges or unexpected hardships and the urge to resort back to your old habits feels irresistible, but those with a purpose persevere. There comes a defining moment in your life where you can seal your fate and prove that you are a changed man. Most revert to their old ways, but those dedicated to breaking the cycle hold steadfast to their beliefs. Putting on a show is easy, but convincing yourself that you've left the past behind, now that's what separates the lions from the sheep."